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ABSTRACT

Fifth graders (18 boys, 15 girls) listened to tape recordings of adult male-female speaker pairs reading an identical passage and selected for each pair the speaker they would prefer to have as their own teacher. Girls selected female significantly more often than male speakers, and boys selected male more often than female speakers, but not significantly so. Girls selected female speakers significantly more often and male speakers significantly less often than boys did. Results are interpreted in terms of sex-role identification and girls' superior sensitivity to vocalic cues. Children's selections of speakers were reliable, and, overall, there was significant agreement among children's preferences for individual speakers. Vocalic cues in addition to those associated with speakers' sex appeared to affect children's selections. (Author)

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The Influence of Vocalic Cues on Children's Preferences for Male and Female Teachers

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Fifth graders (18 boys, 15 girls) listened to tape recordings of adult male-female speaker-pairs reading an identical passage and selected for each pair the speaker they would prefer to have as their own teacher. Girls selected female significantly more often than male speakers, and boys selected male more often than female speakers, but not significantly so. Girls selected female speakers significantly more often and male speakers significantly less often than boys did. Results are interpreted in terms of sex-role identification and girls' superior sensitivity to vocalic cues. Children's selections of speakers were reliable, and overall, there was significant agreement among children's preferences for individual speakers. Vocalic cues in addition to those associated with speakers' sex appeared to affect children's selections.

The major purpose of this study was to examine elementary school children's preferences for teachers on the basis of teachers' voices, to determine how reliable children's preferences on the basis of vocalic cues are, and to find out to what extent children have similar preferences.

One of the earliest and most important discoveries resulting from investigations of vocalic communication is the phenomenon of vocal stereotyping. Pear (1931) and Bonaventura (1935) were among the first to find that not only can and do listeners interpret vocalic cues, but that such cues often are interpreted consistently, yet inaccurately, by groups of listeners. Lambert and his colleagues (e.g., Anisfeld, Bogo & Lambert, 1962; Lambert, Anisfeld & Yeni-Komshian, 1965; Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner & Fillenbaum, 1960) have found that the attitudes and expectations listeners form on the basis of how a person speaks vary as a function of a number of factors, including speaker ethnicity.

It is not hard to imagine numerous instances in which members of various ethnic groups must communicate with one another and where the outcome of such communication may have important social consequences. Williams and his colleagues (Williams, 1970; Williams & Naremore, 1974; Williams, Whitehead & Traupmann, 1971) may well have had such an idea in mind when they launched a series of investigations of teachers' attitudes toward children's speech characteristics, since the classroom often represents a focal point of interaction among members of ethnically mixed communities. Their studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of vocalic cues in determining teachers' impressions of students. It has been shown, for example, that teachers' attitudes toward children's speech are significantly and positively correlated with teachers' expectations of children's potential academic achievement, and that children of minority groups are typically rated lower than children from the ethnic majority (Williams, Whitehead & Miller, 1972). Others have also found that in the United States, northern teachers assigned significantly lower grades, and southern

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teachers significantly higher grades, to identical answers spoken by male students when the student belonged to an ethnic minority (Crowl & MacGinitie, 1974; Crowl & Nurss, 1976). Such findings are dramatic evidence of vocal stereotyping.

The potential educational consequences seem clear if one takes into account the work of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), who demonstrated that teachers' expectations of students' performance affect students' actual performance. Their findings have not gone unchallenged, but even Thorndike (1968), perhaps the most outspoken critic of their work, does not take issue with the notion that teachers' expectations might affect students' performance. Probably because of the extraordinary amount of interest generated by Rosenthal and Jacobson's work (Braun, 1976), studies of speech attitudes within an educational context have inevitably focused on teachers' expectations of students rather than vice versa. There is, however, a priori no more reason to believe that teachers' expectations affect student performance than there is to assume that students' expectations affect teacher performance.

Ethnicity has undoubtedly been the most frequently used independent variable in studies of speech attitudes within an educational setting. By comparison, sex has received virtually no attention, although it has been shown to be an important variable in investigations of teacher-pupil interaction which have not been specifically directed toward the study of speech phenomena (e.g., Bledsoe, Brown & Strickland, 1971; Entwisle, Cornell & Epstein, 1972; Sears & Feldman, 1966).

The aim of the current study was to broaden our knowledge of vocalic communication in two major ways: first, by incorporating sex as an independent variable, and secondly, by focusing on students' expectations of teachers' behavior as reflected in their preferences for teachers.

Fifth grade children were presented recordings of male-female adult speaker-pairs reading an identical passage. For each pair of speakers, children were asked to select the one speaker they would prefer to have as their own teacher.

Evidence of children's stereotyped impressions of teachers may be found in a study by Meyer and Thompson (1956), who compared children's perceptions of teachers' behavior with the actual behavior exhibited by female teachers toward sixth grade boys and girls. Girls believed teachers had more approval contacts with them than with boys, despite the fact that the reverse was actually the case. More recently Erman (1973) found that elementary school children showed a marked preference for teachers of their own sex when presented pictures of male and female teachers of different ethnic groups. Therefore, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

Hypothesis 1. There will be no significant difference between the mean number of selected male and female teachers.

Hypothesis 2. Girls will select significantly more female than male speakers.

Hypothesis 3. Boys will select significantly more male than female speakers.

Hypothesis 4. Female speakers will be selected significantly more often by girls than by boys.

Hypothesis 5. Male speakers will be selected significantly more often by boys than by girls.

It is generally acknowledged that by the time children reach elementary school age, they have acquired the notion of sex identity and are actively engaged in the

acquisition of sex typed responses (Kagan, 1964). Feshbach and Roe (1968) have shown that children empathize to a significantly greater extent with peer models of the same sex than with those of the opposite sex, and Portuges and Feshbach (1972) found that when third graders were shown films of female teacher-models, girls imitated the models' behavior significantly more than boys. (Unfortunately, the study provided no information concerning children's imitation behavior of male teacher-models.)

Hypothesis 6. There will be no significant interaction between the sex of the child's current teacher and the sex of the selected speaker.

Hypothesis 7. There will be no significant interaction between the sex of the child's current teacher, the sex of the child, and the sex of the selected speaker.

Hypothesis 8. There will be no significant difference between the mean frequency of selected first and second speakers within speaker-pairs.

Hypothesis 9. There will be no significant two-, three-, or four-way interactions between the order of speaker within pairs and the sex of the child, the sex of the child's current teacher, or the sex of the selected speaker.

Since it has already been predicted that children will select speakers of their own sex, it follows that children's selections should be reliable.

Hypothesis 10. Speaker selections by boys and girls will be significantly more reliable than chance.

Hypothesis 11. There will be no significant difference between the reliability of boys' and girls' speaker selections.

Portuges and Feshbach (1972) attributed their findings to the process of sex-role identification and to the possibility that girls were more attentive than boys to social cues exhibited by the models. Such an interpretation seems reasonable, for as Kagan (1964) has noted, "most of the overt sex typed responses the girl must acquire require reactions from other people. It is almost impossible for a girl to assess her .... [sex typed] behavior without continued interaction and feedback from the social environment" (p. 151, original italics), although such feedback is not necessary for a boy to acquire his sex typed behavior. Since vocalic cues often function as powerful forms of feedback from the social environment, it would seem reasonable to assume that girls are apt to be more sensitive to such cues than boys are.

Hypothesis 12. There will be significant agreement among girls' selections of individual speakers, regardless of the speakers' sex.

Hypothesis 13. There will be no significant agreement among boys' selections of individual speakers, regardless of speakers' sex.

Method

Subjects

For the initial part of the study, five boys and five girls were randomly selected from each of two fifth grade classrooms at a public elementary school in Staten Island, New York. One classroom had a female and the other a male teacher.

(For a later part of the study, the remaining eight boys and five girls in the male teacher's class were also used, thus yielding a total of 18 boys and 15 girls.) The children had spent almost the full academic year with their respective teachers at the time the data for this study were collected. All of the children were white, lived in a middle socioeconomic neighborhood, and were approximately 10½ years old.

Speech Samples

The speech stimuli for this study were provided by three males and three females who volunteered to have their voices tape recorded. All of the speakers were white, lived in a middle socioeconomic area of Staten Island, and ranged in age from 19 to 27 years, with a mean of 22.5 years. Three speakers were studying on a part-time basis at the college level, two were high school graduates, and one was a recent college graduate. All were employed in either technical or clerical positions. Consequently, possible speech differences associated with age, geographic, ethnic, educational, and socioeconomic characteristics seemed reasonably well controlled. In general, the speakers represented the population from which beginning teachers in the local area typically come, although none was a teacher nor planned to become one.

In order to control for possible effects associated with speech content, all speakers tape recorded an identical 64-word passage dealing with America's bicentennial celebration. The topic was selected because of its potential interest to elementary school children and because it was unrelated to the academic content of the school curriculum, thereby reducing the possibility that children would have either strong positive or negative attitudes toward the topic as a result of previous school experiences.

Each speaker read the passage from a typed script. All recordings were made on a standard Wollensak tape recorder at a speed of 3 3/4 i.p.s. All speakers wore a lavaliere microphone, and their voices were kept at a comparable volume by means of an automatic recording level device.

Initially, four males and four females recorded the passage. Seven female and six male graduate students in education listened to the recordings and rated each speaker in terms of oral reading ability on a scale from 0-6. From the original eight speakers, three males and three females, whose reading ability ratings were not significantly different ($\underline{M}$ = 3.92, $\underline{SD}$ = 1.20 for males; $\underline{M}$ = 3.87, $\underline{SD}$ = 1.03 for females), were chosen for use in the experiment.

Preparation of Tapes

Arrangement of speaker-pairs. Each male speaker was paired with each female speaker, thus forming nine speaker-pairs of opposite sex. The order in which each pair appeared on the experimental tape was determined by random selection, with the restriction that no speaker was permitted to appear in two consecutive pairs. Furthermore, the sex of the first speaker in each pair was determined by random selection, with the restriction that five of the first speakers be of one sex and four of the opposite sex. In order to counterbalance the order of speakers within pairs, the nine pairs were again ordered randomly, with the same restriction that no speaker was permitted to appear in two consecutive pairs. The first speaker in this second pairing was always the second speaker in the first pairing, thus yielding a duplicate set of the nine speaker-pairs in which the order of speakers within pairs was reversed.

Instructions. A set of instructions for the children who served as subjects in the experiment was tape recorded by a male whose voice was not used as part of any speaker-pair. Briefly, the instructions stated that there are a number of ways by which a person forms impressions of another person, including on the basis of how

the other person speaks. Children were told that the men and women whose voices they were to hear were teachers from another school and that they did not know any of the speakers. They were also told that speakers would be saying exactly the same thing, that the speakers would be presented in pairs, and that the same speaker might be heard more than once. Children were asked to decide which speakers sounded like good teachers and to select for each pair the one speaker they would rather have as their own teacher.

Sequential order of material. The experimental tape began with the set of instructions, after which a single pair of speakers was heard. This first pair constituted a practice trial, with neither speaker being used in any of the experimental pairings. The experimental pairs followed immediately. After the third and sixth pairs, a bogus pair of the same sex was inserted in an attempt to encourage children to focus on how the speaker sounded rather than just on the sex of the speaker. Data from the bogus pairings were not analyzed as a part of the study.

Since the experiment was fairly lengthy and the subjects quite young, it was decided to have children listen to the first half of the tape during one experimental session and to the second half during another session. Consequently, after the ninth experimental pair, a brief reminder of the instructions was given. The remainder of the tape was identical in format to that of the first half: an initial practice pair, followed by experimental pairs, and bogus pairs of the same sex inserted after the twelfth and fifteenth experimental pairs.

Speaking times for the passage ranged from 21 to 27 seconds, with a mean of 22.67 seconds. There was a pause of approximately two seconds between individual speakers as well as between pairs of speakers. Each speaker-pair was also preceded by an identification number spoken by the male who had recorded the instructions.

Procedure

Children were presented the first half of the tape during a single session on one day, and the second half the following day. All children were tested in small groups or individually by a white female college student. At the beginning of the session, the experimenter distributed a single sheet of paper to each child which listed the speaker-pairs by number. Next to each pair were two columns labeled First Teacher and Second Teacher respectively, and children indicated their preferences by checking the appropriate column for each pair of speakers.

After the children had heard the instructions, they were given an opportunity to ask the experimenter to clarify any points which may not have been understood. In general, the children had no difficulty comprehending the instructions and carrying out the selection task. At the conclusion of the second session, each child was asked how many of his or her previous teachers had been males.

Data Analysis

The frequency of children's selections was tabulated according to sex of speaker, sex of child, sex of child's current teacher, and order of speaker within speaker-pair, and an analysis of variance with repeated measures was used to examine the data.

Since each child heard each speaker-pair twice, it was possible to examine by means of a *t*-test the reliability of children's choices by comparing the number of identical speaker selections made by boys and girls.

Coefficients of concordance were used to measure the consistency with which individual speakers, regardless of sex, were selected by boys and girls separately and together.

In order to examine the relationship between speaker selection and speakers' oral reading ability, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed, using the mean ratings on both measures.

Results

Ten boys and 10 girls were randomly selected from two fifth grade classrooms. Half of the children of each sex currently had a male teacher, and half a female teacher. A 2 X 2 X 2 X 2 analysis of variance with repeated measures was carried out, using sex of child, sex of speaker, sex of child's current teacher, and order of speaker within speaker-pair as independent variables. It should be noted that the design of the experiment precluded the possibility of examining main effects associated with sex of child, sex of child's current teacher, or individual children, since all children were required to make exactly the same number of choices.

The interaction between sex of child and sex of speaker was the only significant finding, F (1, 16) = 8.36, $p < .025$. Since there was no significant interaction between sex of child's current teacher and any other variable, hypotheses 6 and 7 were confirmed, and data obtained from the additional eight boys and five girls in the male teacher's class were combined with the data from the other 20 children for further analysis.

The combined data were examined by a 2 X 2 X 2 analysis of variance with repeated measures, using sex of child, sex of speaker, and order of speaker within pairs as independent variables. The results of the second analysis corroborated those of the first. The interaction between sex of child and sex of speaker was the only significant finding, F (1, 31) = 10.02, $p < .005$. Consequently, hypotheses 1, 8, and 9 were confirmed.

The means and standard deviations of boys' and girls' selections of male and female speakers are shown in Table 1. Using Scheffe's test of subgroup comparisons, it was found that girls selected female speakers significantly more often than male speakers, F (3, 62) = 54.76, $p < .001$, and that girls selected female speakers significantly more often and male speakers significantly less often than boys, F (3, 62) = 20.00, $p < .001$. Therefore, hypotheses 2, 4, and 5 were confirmed, but hypothesis 3 was not.

One would expect on the basis of chance that given nine pairs of speakers, with each pair being presented twice, the same speaker would be selected on both occasions an average of 4.5 times. The same speaker was selected significantly more often than chance by both boys (M = 5.56, t (17) = 2.15, $p < .05$) and girls (M = 6.27, t (14) = 4.84, $p < .001$), thus confirming hypothesis 10. Although girls selected the same speaker more often than boys, the difference was not significant, and hypothesis 11 was confirmed.

In order to determine the extent to which individual children made similar judgments about individual speakers, regardless of the speakers' sex, speakers were ranked for every child according to frequency of selection. Coefficients of concordance, corrected for ties, were computed for boys and girls separately and together. All of the coefficients were significant: for boys, W = .14, $p < .05$; for girls, W = .39, $p < .001$; for all children, W = .16, $p < .001$. Therefore, hypothesis 12 was confirmed, but hypothesis 13 was not. The rankings of individual speakers based on the mean number of selections by boys, girls, and all children are shown in Table 2.

In order to see if there was a relationship between speakers' oral reading ability and frequency of speaker selection, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed, using the mean ratings on both measures, and no significant relationship

was found (r = +.20).

Discussion

The results of the study show that children formed stereotyped preferences for teachers as a function of vocalic cues associated with the sex of adult speakers. The findings for girls are completely consistent with those of Erman (1973), since girls selected female significantly more often than male speakers, but the findings for boys show only partial support, since although boys selected male more often than female speakers, the difference was not significant. The discrepancy between the findings for boys in the two studies may be accounted for in terms of the different stimuli used. Whereas Erman used photographs, the current study used adult voices, and it may be that boys are less responsive than girls to vocalic differences.

Support for this assumption is found in a study in which students from kindergarten through the second year college level listened to a tape recording of a female speaker who was described as a teacher making comments to children in an art class. The speaker made positive, neutral, and negative comments in a pleased, indifferent, or displeased tone. Although males perceived the speaker significantly more positively than females, females were significantly more responsive to intonation patterns (Solomon & Ali, 1972).

Related evidence concerning sex differences in responsiveness to vocalic differences in responsiveness to vocalic differences is found in studies of males' and females' ability to recognize vocal expressions of emotion (Davitz, 1964). Although the findings of these studies are not totally consistent in demonstrating female superiority, no study has revealed that males performed significantly better than females. There is also evidence from studies of persuasive communication suggesting that females listen more attentively than males to messages that are presented orally (McGuire, 1969).

It is, of course, possible that children's selections of speakers of their own sex reflected the kinds of experiences they have previously had with male and female teachers. Research evidence bearing on this possibility, however, is difficult to find. Probably because until recently practically all elementary school teachers have been women, studies of teacher-pupil interaction at the elementary level have investigated the behavior of female, but not male teachers, as in the study by Meyer and Thompson cited above.

Although unfortunately there are no known studies in which the behavior of male teachers toward elementary children has been examined, Stevenson (1961) has investigated children's performance as a function of the sex of adults who praised their behavior. He found that girls performed significantly better when males provided the social approval, and boys performed better when the approval was given by females. To the extent that these findings reflect the kinds of experiences children have with male and female teachers, one would expect children to select adult speakers of the opposite sex. Thus, the results of the current study are contradictory to what one would anticipate. Furthermore, the lack of significant interaction between the sex of the child's current teacher and sex of speaker argues against the possibility that experiences with teachers affected children's selections. (It should perhaps be noted that with the exception of one boy in the study, all children had had experience with teachers of both sexes, the mean number of male teachers being 1.4.)

In summary, the most plausible interpretation of the major findings of the current study appears to be that children preferred teachers of their own sex as a result of sex-role identification. Girls' preferences were more pronounced than boys', because in general, girls are more responsive than boys to vocalic cues.

Reliability and Similarity of Preferences

Overall, boys' and girls' speaker selections were significantly more reliable than one would expect on the basis of chance. There were large individual differences, however, among children's consistency scores. Boys exhibited more variability (SD = 4.38) than girls (SD = 2.92), but the difference was not significant. It should be noted that the high levels of consistency may be an artifact of the design of the experiment, since an increase in the frequency of choice of speakers of one sex inevitably leads to a higher score for selection consistency, and children did choose more speakers of their own sex than of the opposite sex.

The degree of similarity of children's selections of individual speakers, regardless of the speakers' sex, was statistically significant, although among boys, the significance seems primarily due to the rather large number of individual selections examined rather than due to the absolute magnitude of the coefficient of concordance. In a practical sense, it appears that children's choices of speakers reflected idiosyncratic patterns of preference. On the other hand, the consistency of preference for some individual speakers over others indicates that vocalic cues in addition to those associated with the speakers' sex affected children's selections. The data, however, provide no basis for identifying what the nature of these cues might be.

The nonsignificant relationship between speakers' oral reading ability and frequency of speaker selection may reflect the restricted range of oral reading ability that was purposely introduced in this experiment in order to reduce the possibility of confounding. Although it appears that the possible confounding effects of reading ability were successfully controlled in this study, it seems highly likely that children's speaker selections would be systematically related to reading ability, at least to some extent, if reading ability had been permitted to cover a wider range.

Conclusions

Using tape recordings of male-female adult speaker-pairs, it has been found that elementary school children formed stereotyped preferences for teachers on the basis of sex-related vocalic cues. It appears more likely that children tended to prefer teachers of their own sex because of sex-role identification rather than because of previous experiences with teachers. Girls were more responsive than boys to vocalic cues, since girls are in general more sensitive to social cues and more responsive to vocalic differences than boys are. The reliability of speaker selection varied widely among individual children, but as a group, children exhibited consistency in the choices they made. Although children's personal preferences for individual speakers were varied, overall agreement in preferring some speakers to others indicates that vocalic cues in addition to those associated with speakers' sex affect children's judgments.

To the extent that children's preferences for teachers reflect their expectations of teachers' behavior, it appears that children expect to have more satisfying relationships with teachers of their own sex, and it may be that children's expectations affect teachers' actual behavior. Such an interpretation might in part account for Meyer and Thompson's (1956) finding that female teachers had significantly fewer disapproval contacts with girls than boys, since girls appear to prefer female teachers and correspondingly probably do not expect female teachers to react disapprovingly toward them.

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Footnote

The author wishes to express his appreciation to Pat Santacroce for her assistance in carrying out this experiment.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations
of Children's Selections of Speakers

	Speakers			
	Male		Female	
Children	M	SD	M	SD
Boys	9.44	3.20	8.56	3.20
Girls	6.20	3.55	11.80	3.55

Table 2

Rankings of Individual Speakers
Based on Mean Number of Selections

Speakers	All Children	Boys	Girls
A (Male)	1	1	3½
D (Female)	2	4	1
E (Female)	3	3	2
F (Female)	4	5	3½
B (Male)	5	2	5
C (Male)	6	6	6